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[Sacred Texts](#) [Sagas and Legends](#) [English Folklore](#) [Index](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

ANNE JEFFERIES AND THE FAIRIES.



ANNE JEFFERIES was the daughter of a poor labouring man, who lived in the parish of St Teath. She was born in 1626, and is supposed to have died in 1698.

When she was nineteen years old, Anne, who was a remarkably sharp and clever girl, went to live as a servant in the family of Mr Moses Pitt. Anne was an unusually bold girl, and would do things which even boys feared to attempt. Of course, in those days every one believed in fairies, and everybody feared those little airy beings. They were constantly the talk of the people, and this set Anne longing anxiously to have an interview with some of them. So Anne was often abroad after sundown, turning up the fern leaves, and looking into the bells of the foxglove to find a fairy, singing all the time--

"Fairy fair and fairy bright;
Come and be my chosen sprite."

She never allowed a moonlight night to pass without going down into the valley, and walking against the stream, singing--

"Moon shines bright, waters run clear,
I am here, but where's my fairy dear?"

The fairies were a long time trying this poor girl; for, as they told her afterwards, they never lost sight of her; but there they would be, looking on when she was seeking them, and they would run from frond to frond of the ferns when she was turning them up its her anxious search.

One day Anne, having finished her morning's work, was sitting in the arbour in her master's garden, when she fancied she heard some one moving aside the branches, as though endeavouring to look in upon her; and she thought it must be her sweetheart, so she resolved to take no notice. Anne went on steadily with her work, no sound was heard but the regular beat of the knitting-needles one upon the other. Presently she heard a suppressed laugh, and then again a rustle amidst the branches. The back of the arbour was towards the lane, and to enter the garden it was necessary to walk down the lane to the gate, which was, however, not many yards off.

Click, click went the needles, click, click, click. At last Anne began to feel vexed that the intruder did not show himself, and she pettishly said, half aloud --

"You may stay there till the kueney [a] grows on the gate, ere I 'll come to 'ee."

There was immediately a peculiar ringing and very music laugh. Anne knew this was not her lover's laugh, and she felt afraid. But it was bright day, and she assured herself that no one would do her any mischief, as she knew herself to be a general favourite in the parish. Presently Anne felt assured that the garden gate had been carefully opened and again closed, so she wait anxiously the result. In a few moments she perceived at the entrance of the arbour six little men, all clothed very handsome in green. They were beautiful little figures, and had very charming faces, and such bright eyes. The grandest of these little visitors, who wore a red feather in his cap, advanced in front the others, and, making a most polite bow to Anne, addressed her familiarly in the kindest words.

This gentleman looked so sweetly on Anne that she was charmed beyond measure, and she put down her hand as if shake hands with her little friend, when he jumped into her palm and she lifted him into her lap. He then, without any more ad clambered upon her bosom and neck, and began kissing her. Anne never felt so charmed in her life as while this one little gentleman was playing with her; but presently he called his companion and they all clambered up by her dress as best they could, and kissed her neck, her lips, and her eyes. One of them ran his fingers over her eyes, and she felt as if they had been pricked with a pin. Suddenly Anne became blind, and she felt herself whirled through the air at a great rate. By and by, one of her little companions said something which sounded like "Tear away," and lo! Anne had her sight at once restored. She was in one of the most beautiful places -- temples and palaces of gold and silver. Trees laden with fruits and flowers. Lakes full of gold and silver fish and the air full of birds of the sweetest song, and the more brilliant colours. Hundreds of ladies and gentlemen were walking about. Hundreds more were idling in the most luxurious bowers, the fragrance of the flowers oppressing them with sense of delicious repose. Hundreds were also dancing, engaged in sports of various kinds. Anne was, however, surprised to find that these happy people were no longer the small people she had previously seen. There was now no more than the difference usually seen in a crowd, between their height and her own. Anne found herself arrayed in the most highly-decorated clothes. So grand, indeed, did she appear, that she doubted her identity. Anne was constantly attended by her six friends; but the finest gentleman, who was the first to address her, continued her favourite, at which the others appeared to be very jealous. Eventually Anne and her favourite contrived to separate themselves, and they retired into some most lovely gardens, where they were hidden by the luxuriance of the flowers. Lovingly did they pass the time, and Anne desired that this should continue for ever. However, when they were at the happiest, there was heard a great noise, and presently the five other fairies at the head of a great crowd came after them in a violent rage. Her lover drew his sword to defend her, but this was soon beaten down, and he lay wounded at her feet. Then the fairy who had blinded her again placed his hands upon her eyes, and all was dark. She heard strange noises, and felt herself whirled about and about, and as if a thousand flies were buzzing around her.

At length her eyes were opened, and Anne found herself on the ground in the arbour where she had been sitting in the morning, and many anxious faces were around her, all conceiving that she was recovering from a convulsion fit. [b]

[a] Moss, or mildew; properly. *cuney*.

[b] See Moses Pitt's Letter, Appendix K

[Next: The Piksie Threshers](#)

[Sacred Texts](#) | [Legends/Sagas](#)

[« Previous: Popular Romances of the West of England: The Fairies: The...](#)

[Index](#)

[Next: Popular Romances of the West of England: The Fairies: The... »](#)